

Certified Registered Nurse First Assistant study

ISSUE: Should certified registered nurse first assistants (CRNFAs) be paid separately under Medicare for first assistant at surgery services?

KEY POINTS: Section 643 of the MMA requires MedPAC to conduct a study on the feasibility and advisability of providing for payment under part B for surgical first assisting services furnished by a certified registered nurse first assistant to Medicare beneficiaries. The report on the study together with recommendations for such legislation or administrative actions as the Commission determines to be appropriate is due by January 1, 2005.

Physicians and specified non-physician practitioners (physician assistants, clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, and certified nurse midwives) are paid separately by Medicare when they function as first assistant at surgery. Physicians are paid 16 percent of the physician fee for surgery, non-physician practitioners (NPPs) are paid 85 percent of 16 percent (or 13.6 percent) of the physician fee. Other NPPs who function as first assistants, such as CRNFAs, surgical technologists, and orthopedic physician assistants, are not eligible for separate payment.

The issue paper provides some background and analysis of the issue and outlines some options that the Commission might wish to consider.

ACTION: The staff seeks Commission direction as to which broad option they prefer and how they would like the staff to develop that option into a letter report to the Congress.

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